United Nations A/54/PV.10

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

10th plenary meeting
Thursday, 23 September 1999, 10.00 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic of Albania

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Albania.

Mr. Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic of Albania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Albania, His Excellency Mr. Rexhep Meidani, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Meidani (*spoke in French*): Let me begin, Sir, by congratulating you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly, and to voice my full confidence that the work of this session, under your leadership, will be crowned with success. I wish also to express my great appreciation of the way in which your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, guided the work of the fifty-third session.

I take this opportunity also to welcome the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to the great United Nations family, and to convey to them our best wishes for the future.

I am pleased to say that this year has been marked by genuinely positive developments for Albania in the political, social and economic spheres. Albania has made progress in strengthening its democratic institutions and its civil society, in achieving respect for human rights and freedoms, and in enhancing public order and the rule of law.

As a new democracy, Albania is tireless in its efforts to strengthen and consolidate its institutional structures. There has been tangible progress in bringing about the independence of the legislative, executive and judicial branches. At the same time, efforts to coordinate them are moving forward without in any way affecting their separate identities.

The Albanian State and Government have given priority to economic development by promoting free initiative in the privatization process, principally in strategically important sectors. We have also made a continuous effort to formulate and implement modern legislation that can encourage and support domestic investment and can channel foreign investment into especially profitable vital sectors of our economy.

We have every reason to appreciate the beneficial cooperation between Albania and the World Bank, which has resulted in the implementation of projects of great importance to the Albanian economy, and also in their effective management. We are grateful too for the support of the International Monetary Fund, whose activities have made a great contribution to revitalizing my country's finances.

99-85866 (E)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

We are well aware that no State can have a healthy economy or a solid democracy without secure public order, the rule of law and a strong civil society. Among the thorniest problems now facing Albanian society and especially the Albanian State are neutralizing both common and organized crime and putting an end to corruption in certain sectors. Great efforts and substantial resources have been deployed in this area to increase the effectiveness of the police and other administrative structures engaged in crime-fighting. I take this opportunity to express my great appreciation for the assistance provided by the Multinational Advisory Police Element of the Western European Union and by a number of individual States, in particular for the restructuring and training of the Albanian police and for the provision of logistical equipment.

At the same time, I would like to say that the Government of Albania, and I myself, attach great importance to the direct commitment of the United Nations to the process of disarming the civilian population. I would like to take this occasion to congratulate Mr. Dhanapala on his last visit to Albania.

Considering corruption to be an extreme evil and a serious obstacle to the development of a healthy democracy, the Albanian Parliament and Government have adopted tough legislative and administrative measures to deal with it, establishing specific structures to better uncover and punish abuse of power in certain corrupt sectors of the administration and the judiciary.

During previous sessions, Albania has stated — and we still hold — that the main objective of our strategy is integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures and into other global and regional organizations. Our clear objective is to join the European Union, which we do not doubt for a moment can be achieved, so the Albanian Government considers as a fundamental priority raising the level of its relations with the European Union. I am glad to say that there has been a qualitative improvement in those relations. Cooperation has been intensified in various fields, which bodes well for the signing of an association agreement fairly soon.

There have also been positive developments in our rapprochement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), following the modernization of the Albanian army, and above all thanks to the unreserved help provided to the NATO forces during the Kosovo conflict.

I am also happy to note that my country's efforts over many years to become a member of the World Trade Organization seem to be about to be crowned with success.

The work of the current session is taking place while Kosovo and the entire region are making efforts to heal the wounds inflicted by the Milosevic regime. The concerns expressed by the Albanian delegation at the fifty-third session with regard to the policy of "ethnic cleansing", which went as far as genocide, perpetrated by the Belgrade regime against the Albanian population of Kosovo, proved well-founded. In the framework of this chauvinistic policy, the most barbarous crimes were committed: tens of thousands of Albanians were massacred, thousands of houses were destroyed or set on fire, and more than half the population were expelled from their land and had to go to neighbouring countries, particularly Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. Thousands of other people went into the mountains and lived in unimaginable conditions in order to escape certain death. The massacres at Raçak, Peja, Rahovec and Malishevo, the daily discovery of mass graves containing children, women, young people and old men and women, killed by the Serb army, militias and policemen, will continue to testify to a genocide without precedent on the threshold of the new millennium.

It is with horror that I condemn the execution of dozens of eminent Kosovar intellectuals and the imprisonment of hundreds of others.

The Milosevic regime ignored the warnings of the international community and its call for an acceptable resolution of the Kosovo crisis. It arrogantly rejected the proposals formulated in the Rambouillet agreement by the Contact Group and increased the repression of the Albanians in Kosovo, thus endangering peace and security in the Balkans. In these circumstances, the NATO countries, legitimately defending the sacred principles of the United Nations Charter, had to intervene militarily in order to force Belgrade to withdraw its armed forces from Kosovo.

We congratulate the international community on having shown on this occasion unlike the similar situation in Bosnia, a firm will to condemn the crimes perpetuated against a defenceless population, take effective measures to put an end to those crimes and establish peace in the troubled region of the Balkans.

The whole Albanian nation has expressed its profound gratitude to NATO, the United States of America, the United Nations, the Organization for

Security and Cooperation in Europe, and all the international forces which contributed to ending the humanitarian disaster in Kosovo and re-establishing peace there. In particular, I pay tribute to the action and the personal commitment of Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in the settlement of this conflict and the ending of the humanitarian crisis.

I also pay special tribute to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for its commitment to public exposure of the crimes against the Albanian people of Kosovo and for becoming an interpreter for the whole Albanian nation in their just request that all those responsible for crimes against the innocent population be put in the dock. I call on all countries, especially those in our region, to cooperate with the Tribunal, as recommended in Security Council resolutions.

The Albanian State has done everything to ensure that the conflict in Kosovo is resolved as soon as possible and peace is re-established in the Balkans. Engaging in intense political activity, we have striven to ensure that the political forces in Kosovo adopt a common attitude and accept the Rambouillet peace plan. The Albanian State, while committing itself firmly to defending its territorial integrity and sovereignty, has refused to respond to provocations by Serb forces at the border. Albania has not fallen for Milosevic's manoeuvres designed to extend the conflict in the region.

Despite our great economic and financial difficulties, Albania has borne the burden of the humanitarian crisis of the refugees from Kosovo. Half a million Kosovars deported from their homes have found shelter among their brothers in Albania. Albanian families opened their doors to their blood brothers, thereby earning widespread respect for their generosity. As I recall this period, I would like to express our deep gratitude for he invaluable assistance given us by States and international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, especially those working within the United Nations framework. The United Nations, implementing Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), is today, in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis, playing a decisive role. The new civil administration, composed of representatives of the entire population of Kosovo, is almost in place, with the help in particular of the United Nations, the European Union and the OSCE; it is working feverishly in the edification, democratization and strengthening of a multi-ethnic civil society, with respect for human rights and a framework of institutions imbued by that respect.

KFOR is carrying out the difficult task of preserving stability and the fragile peace in the Kosovo region. I take this opportunity to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Bernard Kouchner, for his efforts to attain the established objectives. I am confident that the United Nations and the organizations supporting it will continue their action so as to eliminate all negative factors that might compromise a secure and complete peace and the future of the Kosovo region. We support the efforts of all the international and Kosovar political forces to ensure peaceful coexistence between Albanians and the ethnic minorities in Kosovo. We express our wish and conviction that these efforts, based on Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), will be crowned with success.

The end of the conflict in the Kosovo region and the concern of the international community to transform the Balkans from the powder keg it has been into a region of peace and stability have given the countries in our region a historic opportunity to achieve development, prosperity and democratization. We have resolved not to miss that opportunity. First and foremost, our societies must abandon their archaic chauvinistic mindset, which has been the sources of division and hatred and which should no longer outweigh the desire for unity, friendship and cooperation among peoples.

We must struggle towards and succeed in quarantining all policies that encourage hatred and ethnic divisions, because such anachronistic policies have been the source of human catastrophes and remain one of the main causes of the destabilization of our region and the delay in our economic development.

Our countries share common interests in the strategic, economic and security spheres. In this regard, we want to become integrated into powerful structures such as the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). But it would not be realistic to think we will easily attain this objective. We fully realize that we are at the initial stage of this process. Thus we believe that all the countries of the region should coordinate their efforts in order to become — all together, not separately — integrated into those structures.

The Stability Pact on South-Eastern Europe is the fundamental document for the consolidation of democratic values, for economic growth and for the strengthening of security in our region. I take this opportunity to salute the full support provided to this initiative by the countries

of our region at the Cologne and Sarajevo meetings. The State and the Government of Albania support all efforts that have been undertaken within the political boundaries of the former Yugoslavia to promote democracy and the process of integration in the region. We welcome all democratic developments in Serbia, the consequence of which should be to remove from power the political group responsible for the crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia and to eliminate the chauvinistic mindset that encourages war. Such a mindset is no longer acceptable in civilized Europe.

The Albanian Government is adopting measures with a view to attaining the objectives of the Stability Pact. The immediate objectives include various ideas and concrete proposals aimed at the development of economic relations with the countries in the region, the creation of inter-Balkan institutions to monitor respect for human rights and the strengthening of security measures. The Albanian State expects that in the near future the Balkans will become a democratic region with an economy intended to reach the level of those of the developed countries, a region that respects human rights, in accordance with advanced European and global standards. We believe that because of the damage suffered during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and particularly in Kosovo, Albania deserves preferential treatment within the framework of the Stability Pact.

As far as we are concerned, the free circulation of people, ideas, capital and goods — a Balkan *mini-Schengen* — is the precondition for a rapid development of the economy, social life and democracy of our region. A democratic Balkans is unimaginable if our countries build walls in order to prevent the free circulation of people. Reciprocal free movement would contribute greatly to bringing people together and to cultural exchanges and, thereby, to the elimination of the hatred and inter-ethnic conflicts that up till now have so cruelly shaken this part of Europe.

Albania appreciates the role currently being played by the European Union, the United States of America and other countries in the framework of these positive developments. It hopes that this interest in the development and democratization of the region will persist with the same level of commitment and the same intensity.

While attaching priority to the problems of our region, the State and the Government of Albania have been and continue to remain attentive to developments in other parts of the world. We welcome the progress in the peace process in the Middle East and Northern Ireland. For my part, I would like to express the fervent hope that these processes prove irreversible.

We appreciate the role played by the United Nations in organizing the referendum on the future of East Timor. We hope the most recent agreements and resolutions, with the international presence, in particular that of the United Nations, will lead to the stabilization of the situation in that country as soon as possible.

Given the ever-growing importance of multilateral international cooperation, Albania intends to become an ever more active Member of the United Nations and of other international organizations, in order to be able to better contribute to safeguarding peace throughout the world. Albania salutes the efforts of the United Nations to continue to strengthen its role in resolving the acute problems facing humanity today in the political, economic and humanitarian spheres. I take this opportunity to express my great appreciation for the action of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, aimed at reforming and reviving the Organization.

In connection with this reform, Albania is in favour of the democratization and strengthening of the Security Council so that it better reflects new international realities and has more transparent procedures and working methods and a simplified decision-making process. We support the financial and budgetary reform of the United Nations, the objective of which is better management of financial resources and, thus, the increased effectiveness of United Nations programmes and projects.

Allow me to express once again to you, Mr. President, and to all the delegations present here my fervent wish that this session of the Assembly will meet with success in advancing global peace, stability and prosperity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Albania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rexhep Mejdani, President of the Republic of Albania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Cyprus.

Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Cyprus, His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Clerides: I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I have no doubt that your long experience and proven diplomatic skills will guide the work of this session to a successful conclusion. Moreover, we interpret your election as a well-deserved recognition of your country, Namibia, for which the Cypriot people entertain feelings of admiration and friendship.

I would also like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Opertti of Uruguay, for the determined leadership with which he steered the work of the fifty-third session.

Cyprus joins other States in extending a warm welcome to the new Members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

As we are rapidly approaching the dawn of the new millennium, we have an obligation to reaffirm our commitment to this truly global Organization and to the ideas that have made the United Nations the hope of mankind for a world governed by peace, justice and the rule of law.

And yet, the challenges that we face seem at times insurmountable. Our world is characterized by a large array of old and constantly emerging new problems, such as violent international conflicts and internal strife. Moreover, the United Nations has to respond to many challenges, such as the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, the control of epidemics and natural disasters, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The Organization's efforts in these areas have been considerable and must not be underestimated. I take this opportunity to reaffirm my Government's strong commitment to the United Nations and our support for the ongoing efforts to reform it, so that it will be able to successfully meet the considerable challenges that lie ahead.

Cyprus will work towards the successful conclusion of the Millennium Assembly. We look forward to an interactive Summit. We anticipate an in-depth and result-oriented discussion, with the participation of civil society, during the work of the many special sessions on various facets of the Organization's work.

One of the major issues of concern to all humanity is disarmament. I would like to reaffirm our support for these efforts including, *inter alia*, a strengthened review process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In the field of human rights, the United Nations plays a very special role not only in developing and enhancing the regime of human rights instruments, but also in the prevention of possible violations and the constantly expanding humanitarian relief efforts.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, we reaffirm our commitment to the cause of human rights and the promotion of humanitarian law. Cyprus fully supported the adoption of the Statute of a permanent International Criminal Court.

Cyprus follows the situation in the Middle East with intense interest. We rejoice at the winds of hope that have recently appeared in the efforts to finally achieve peace in that long-tormented area and welcome the recent Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Cyprus, as a neighbouring State with close relations to the parties involved in the Middle East, reiterates its support for a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the implementation of the peace accords.

The recent tragedy that has unfolded in Kosovo has demonstrated the fragility of peace in the heart of Europe and the imperative need to address a new array of problems that have the potential to destabilize an entire region. The international community, as well as the parties involved, have an obligation to create the conditions for reconciliation, so that what has transpired

in Kosovo and Yugoslavia in general will never be allowed to take place again.

Cyprus fully supports Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and calls for full respect for the human rights of all Kosovars, irrespective of their origin, as well as for the sovereignty of all States in the region. My Government also welcomes the initiative of the European Union that led to the adoption of the Stability Pact last June as an important initiative that will contribute considerably to the economic and political stabilization of south-eastern Europe and help its peoples construct a new future.

Cyprus welcomes the several United Nations initiatives and recommendations stemming from the follow-up to the report of the Secretary-General concerning Africa. The international community should redouble its efforts to assist the countries of Africa to overcome the ethnic strife and wars; to eradicate poverty; successfully to combat disease; to win the fight against drug trafficking; to obtain sustainable development; and to face the challenges of the future.

The recent devastating earthquake that struck Turkey has once more demonstrated the frailty of human beings before nature's incredible power of destruction. I take this opportunity to reiterate to the Turkish people our sympathy for the enormous losses suffered and to urge the international community to lend a helping hand for the reconstruction of the devastated areas. Despite the political problems that exist between our respective States, the magnitude of the suffering of the Turkish people has deeply moved the people of Cyprus.

I wish to congratulate all those countries which rushed to save Turkish lives, and in particular Greece, which, despite its many differences and problems with Turkey, was one of the first countries to send its teams to work side by side with Turkish teams to rescue the Turkish people who were buried alive under the ruins of the earthquake. I want also to congratulate Turkey for reciprocating in the same manner after the subsequent earthquake in Greece and I wish to salute the new spirit of friendship which has started to emerge between the two countries.

This year marks a quarter of a century since the Turkish invasion and unlawful occupation of 37 per cent of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus. I could today, from this podium, point an accusing finger at Turkey and talk at length about the ethnic cleansing it practised against the Greek Cypriots, which resulted in 180,000 Greek Cypriots becoming refugees in their own country. I could bring up the drama of the relatives of the 1,600 Greek Cypriots missing since the invasion of Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974. I could point out the many violations of human rights of the Greek Cypriots by citing decisions of the European Court and reports of the European Commission of Human Rights, holding Turkey responsible for such violations. Today I will abstain from doing so, because I prefer to look to the future, and not to deal with the past.

We are currently waiting for the United Nations Secretary-General to issue invitations to both sides to take part in negotiations, under the auspices of the United Nations, in the most ambitious initiative ever undertaken to find a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem.

This initiative enjoys the active support of the international community, and particularly the Group of the eight most industrialized countries, the Security Council, the European Union and the Non-Aligned Movement.

We are well aware that currently the international community, and especially those States which are in a position to influence the foreign policy of Turkey, are working methodically to persuade Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr. Denktash, to participate in talks without any preconditions; that is, not to insist on the recognition of the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and not to demand that negotiations be conducted between the two States, instead of communities, as envisaged in the Security Council resolutions.

Regrettably, on 16 September the Prime Minister of Turkey, Mr. Ecevit, in a public statement, not only insisted on the two preconditions I have just mentioned, but added that the economic embargo against the Turkish Cypriots must be lifted. The Prime Minister of Turkey knows that the so-called embargo is a result of a decision of the European Court, to the effect that certificates of origin and/or quality issued by the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus cannot be accepted by the European Union, because the State referred to is not recognized. The Prime Minister of Turkey should also be aware that there is a category of reciprocal measures that need to be discussed and resolved, and that the question of the embargo falls in that category.

I have already stated publicly, but also to the Secretary-General and to the heads of State or Government of the five permanent members of the Security Council, that we are ready to respond positively

to the Secretary-General's invitation to attend the talks and to negotiate a solution to the problem within the parameters established by the international community through Security Council resolutions. The parameters so established provide that Cyprus must be a bicommunal, bizonal federal republic, with a single sovereignty, an international personality and a single citizenship, and that the settlement must exclude union, in whole or in part, with any other country or any form of partition or secession.

My vision for the solution of the Cyprus problem within those parameters requires a partnership of the two communities that would constitutionally provide for the maximum degree of internal self-administration for the two constituent cantons, provinces or states. Adhering to the principle of the equal political status of the constituent parts, it must provide them with the same rights, powers and functions regarding their respective separate internal self-administration. The constitution must also provide for the effective participation of both communities in the federal Government.

Such a federation, becoming a member of the European Union, will thrive at home and abroad, enjoying genuine peace, stability and security, based on international law and legality. It will be supervised by an international force authorized by the Security Council, under terms and conditions so defined as to give the force the right to intervene if it finds that one community, by unlawful acts, puts in danger the safety of the other community or attempts to destroy the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the federal State or destroy the agreements reached.

I have stated that both communities must learn from the mistakes of the past and must work hard for the creation of a common and bright future for all, instead of clinging to attitudes which brought about the tragedy in the island. It is, therefore, imperative that we find a just, workable and viable solution which will safeguard the human rights of every citizen and heal the wounds of the past, bringing at the same time a sense of security to both communities by providing full disarmament under international supervision.

Our side will approach negotiations on the Cyprus problem with courage and flexibility, partly because we recognize that solving it is in the interest of all Cypriots, but also because that will contribute to the overall stability of the region, which is so much demanded by the international community.

I regret that Mr. Denktash is reported to have refused to respond positively to any initiative to negotiate with me as representative of the Greek Cypriot community, on the pretext that I am also the President of the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus.

Time and time again I have explained to him that I sit in the talks not as the President of the Republic of Cyprus, but as the representative of the Greek Cypriot community, because the Security Council resolutions call upon the two communities to negotiate, not upon the State of the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot community.

It also saddens me when he attempts to set aside the parameters for the solution of the Cyprus problem, set by the international community and the high-level agreements he made before the Secretary-General of the United Nations twice, for a bicommunal, bizonal federation. He attempts now to set new parameters for the solution, based on two separate sovereign States, and to impose their acceptance by refusing to come to the negotiating table unless his conditions are met.

In support of his precondition, he advances the argument that the term "equal political status", referred to in United Nations resolutions, must be interpreted to mean that his break-away Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus must be recognized, since the Republic of Cyprus is internationally recognized, in order that the two negotiators may have equal status. He forgets that the Security Council, by its resolution, deplored the action of the Turkish side of declaring a separate State, and asked all its members not to recognize it, a request with which all complied, with the exception of Turkey, the occupying Power.

The parameters for the solution of the Cyprus problem are already in place. They are included in the relevant United Nations resolutions. What is required is the political will of the two sides. I can assure the Assembly that the Greek Cypriot side stands ready to negotiate in good faith so that a bicommunal, bizonal Federal Republic of Cyprus will finally become a reality.

I join my voice with those of the G-8, the Security Council and the European Union in asking Mr. Denktash to come to the negotiating table without preconditions. I honestly believe that within the parameters of the Security Council resolutions we can find a solution which will safeguard the legitimate interests of both communities and bring peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean.

I wish also to repeat my invitation to the Turkish Cypriot community to join forces with us in our European Union accession course. That course, which is the greatest achievement since the establishment of the Cyprus Republic, is continuing with success. Accession to the European Union will benefit both communities equally.

The Cyprus problem has often been described as complicated and intractable. I do not share this view. The Cyprus problem can and will be solved if the international community demands its solution with the necessary determination, within the parameters it has set.

In the effort for the solution of the Cyprus problem, as a small State, Member of the United Nations, we rely on the support of the international community and the United Nations. We look upon its Charter as a beacon of justice, and on the United Nations as the hope for a better future.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Cyprus for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Nigeria.

Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Obasanjo: A little over two decades ago I addressed this Assembly as head of a military Government in Nigeria. On that occasion the focus of my statement was the urgent need to terminate colonial rule in Namibia and Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and dismantle the racist apartheid South Africa. Today it is a great source of joy for me and my delegation that a distinguished son of Namibia is presiding over the affairs of the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly. My delegation assures you, Sir, of its full cooperation and unwavering support throughout your tenure.

May I also convey through you, Sir, our deep appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for the able and efficient manner in which he conducted the proceedings of the fifty-third session.

Our appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his visionary leadership and the invaluable work of the Secretariat under his stewardship.

Permit me also to warmly welcome, on behalf of my country and delegation, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, which have just joined this family of nations.

I stand before this Assembly today very proud to be the leader of a Nigeria that has successfully managed the transition to democracy after a decade and a half of military rule. I would like to seize this opportunity to express the profound appreciation of all Nigerians for the international support and encouragement which combined so effectively with the relentless determination of Nigerians themselves to reconstruct and transform their country into a vibrant democracy.

Our Administration has raised the hopes of Nigerians, and their expectations are correspondingly high. We are well aware of the enormity of the challenges that we face. But we are fully resolved to tackle our numerous social, economic and political problems head on. And, by the Grace of God, we will not fail.

Since assuming office some four months ago our administration has put in place an institutional framework for the purpose of reconciling competing interests and groups in our society. Our democratic institutions are now operating effectively within the system of checks and balances enshrined in our Constitution. Furthermore, we have opted for a policy of inclusiveness in all our political appointments, with a Cabinet, for instance, in which all registered political parties are represented, thus moving away from the divisive practice of winner takes all.

Our Administration has initiated policies aimed at revitalizing the economy in order to create an enabling environment for investment and economic growth. We have also put in place an appropriate legal framework for the protection of foreign investments and repatriation of legitimate profits.

Other measures that we have taken include a vigorous anti-corruption campaign; the promotion of transparency and accountability in public life; the abolition of decrees and regulations which hindered the inflow of foreign investment; the generation of opportunities for employment and income savings for domestic investment; and the privatization of key State enterprises, such as electricity and telecommunications; legislation and other measures to redress obvious cases of neglect and injustice done to ethnic minorities, particularly in the oil-producing areas of the Niger delta region, and to deal with the problems of the environment; investigation of past human rights violations, with a view to promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms; and strengthening the capacity of the law enforcement agencies to promote law and order, as well as security, and to deal more effectively with the problem of drug trafficking.

Africa is indeed proud and glad to see the end of this century coincide with the total elimination of colonialism and the twin menace of constitutionalized racism in the southern part of the continent. The United Nations deserves our warm commendation for the crucial role it has played in this process.

Let me also pay tribute to the thousands who lost their lives in the struggle for freedom so that those of us alive today can proudly say we have the destiny of the continent in our own hands. It is, however, a destiny which poses monumental challenges in our effort to improve the quality of life on our continent. We must strive to alleviate the grinding poverty and material deprivation that has persistently remained a feature of our political freedom.

As we approach the dawn of the new millennium, the defining feature of our increasingly interdependent world is accelerated globalization, and the liberalization of production, trade, investment and finance.

But for us in the developing world the reality today is quite different. Globalization, in its various manifestations, is already experiencing a troubled relationship with the imperatives of development.

It is rather tragic that Africa, the least developed of all the regions and the least able to cope with external shocks, has borne the brunt of the adverse effects of globalization of the world economy. There are grim statistics which indicate that the well-known marginalization of the African continent has turned into delinkage from the global scene.

Since 1992 Africa's exports and imports as a share of world trade has declined from 4 per cent to 2 per cent. Africa's development is presently straitjacketed by a debt burden of around $300 billion. The continent is experiencing import compression, weak productivity and low output. On the average, factories that are still operating do so at less than 30 per cent of installed capacity. Africa's share in total foreign direct investment inflows to developing countries has dropped from 11 per cent in the late 1980s to less than 5 per cent in the second half of the 1990s, and to a meagre 1.2 per cent of world foreign direct investment flows in 1997.

This trend has continued, despite the efforts of African countries to implement far-reaching economic reforms and maintain macroeconomic stability, particularly through the introduction of a more open and business-friendly investment environment, and the provision of incentives to attract foreign investment.

In the quest for a better and fairer management of a globalized world economy, it is now incumbent upon us to direct our searchlight on the unsatisfactory evolution of the multilateral trading system. In participating in the historic Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations that ushered in the new rules-based trading system, the developing world had hoped that the new trading regime would enhance their trading fortunes, facilitate their effective integration into the world economy, and arrest their marginalization from the global trading system.

Unfortunately, however, the vast majority of developing countries, particularly in Africa, have so far been unable to reap the benefits arising from their membership of the World Trade Organization. Africa's trade prospects continue to be hampered by the non-implementation of the special and differential provisions that favour developing countries, and the increasingly protectionist measures that are being imposed against their export products. Besides, the paucity of technical and financial assistance that would have enabled the developing countries to take advantage of the limited

market access opportunities that exist continues to deepen Africa's marginalization in the globalized world economy.

Without doubt, the biggest monetary and financial obstacle confronting developing countries is the chronic debt overhang. According to United Nations figures, the global debt of all developing countries stood at $567 billion in 1980, and $1.4 trillion in 1992. In that 12-year period these countries made foreign debt payments totalling $1.6 trillion. Now, out of the 41 countries which the World Bank describes as heavily indebted poor countries, 33 are African countries, a group that some believe is richly deserving of its own special category: severely indebted low-income countries. Today in sub-Saharan Africa every man, woman and child owes $357. This is a continent where millions live in abject poverty, earning around $100 a year, or 27 cents a day. Some African countries now spend as much as four times on servicing debts as they do on education and health care. Some countries spend up to 40 per cent of their national budgets on debt servicing. Furthermore, it is reliably estimated that for every dollar given in official development aid, $3 go back to the rich countries in debt service payments.

I make bold to assert that calling for debt relief for developing countries is not a plea for charity, but is an urgent matter of social and economic justice. It has to be redressed if there is to be peace and stability in the twenty-first century. Therefore, we propose definitive debt cancellation, not just reduction or rescheduling of the debt service regime. Eligibility should be limited to unpayable debts, which for Africa means the bulk of the $300 billion current stock of debt. There should be debt remission that is not predicated on the institutionally harsh conditionalities of structural adjustment programmes. There should be recognition on both sides of the bargaining table that lenders and borrowers share joint responsibilities for debts incurred in circumstances that are morally questionable in the first place. Debt cancellation should benefit ordinary people.

Nigerians rightly expect democracy to yield perceptible dividends in their lives. Our Administration will, however, find the task of meeting this expectation virtually impossible without substantial reduction of our debt burden, especially as we call on the same citizens to make the sacrifices that are implicit in the recent measures aimed at prudent management of our national economy.

I wish to invite the attention of the Assembly to the related issue of illegal capital flight from Africa. It is an open secret that much of Africa's wealth has been illegally siphoned out of the continent by corrupt regimes and unpatriotic individuals working in collaboration with foreign partners. Nigeria and many African countries would be able to pay off large portions of their debts if only they could recover some of the capital illegally stashed abroad. We thus believe that now is the time to collectively deal with this issue.

In this regard, Nigeria calls for a concerted effort by the international community, through an international convention, for the repatriation to Africa and the developing world of all capital illegally transferred from these countries. Such an international convention or agreement is legally feasible and morally sustainable. It will compel participating banks to disclose the source of the illegal accounts they hold, repatriate them to the countries of rightful ownership and subject the guilty parties to the full weight of national and international law.

It is with a heavy heart that I raise the issue of the HIV/AIDS pandemic throughout Africa. Our continent is bearing the brunt of this terrible disease that now kills around 2 million Africans annually, thus officially overtaking malaria as Africa's number one primary health-care problem. This situation is even more frightening in that it has now left 6 million children orphaned in the eastern and southern parts of Africa. In West Africa the disease has been spreading just as rapidly. Unlike malaria, which is location specific, HIV/AIDS knows neither climatic nor regional boundaries. Global cooperation is an imperative if we are to succeed in dealing with this scourge.

Among the immediate challenges facing Nigeria and Africa today is resolving the many conflicts raging on the continent. Today, as many as 19 sub-Saharan countries are engaged in armed conflicts. The negative impact of these conflicts in human, social, economic and environmental destruction does not need to be described here. Nigeria and indeed the entire West African subregion have devoted considerable human, material, political and diplomatic resources to the resolution of these crises in the subregion, starting with Liberia and subsequently Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. Similarly, efforts are being made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Angola towards peaceful resolution of their conflicts.

Indeed, African leaders at the recent summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Algiers, and at the urging of the Nigerian delegation, agreed to declare next year as the Year of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa. By this declaration, we have dedicated ourselves to making the year 2000 the year when Africans direct all their efforts into effectively eliminating armed conflicts on their continent. We hope to build on the fresh momentum for peace occasioned by the budding peace initiatives in Congo, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Angola.

We are also agreed on the overriding need to uphold codes of decency, ethics and minimum standards of decorum among African Governments and their leadership. Gone are the days when the OAU turned a blind eye to the excesses and abuses of power by member Governments. Forceful and undemocratic changes of Governments will no longer be overlooked or tolerated. We intend to condemn in absolute terms all violations of these codes and to ostracize their perpetrators. It is our duty and moral responsibility to treat our citizens decently and humanely.

My country has always believed that the threat to international peace and security from any corner of the globe should be considered a threat to the peace and security of the world as a whole. While the maintenance of international peace and security remains the primary responsibility of the Security Council, the Charter provision for the complementary role of regional and subregional groups has also proved to be critical to the maintenance of peace at the regional and global levels. The establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) is a clear testimony of our commitment to subregional peace. As the record shows, ECOMOG succeeded in putting an end to the Liberian war in 1997, reinstating the democratically elected President of Sierra Leone in 1998, and bringing about the current Peace Agreement for Sierra Leone signed in Lomé in July 1999.

The time has come, however, for the Security Council to assume its full responsibility, specifically in Sierra Leone and other conflict flash points in Africa. For too long, the burden of preserving international peace and security in West Africa has been left almost entirely to a few States in our subregion. The non-implementation of the Peace Agreement and Nigeria's continual burden in Sierra Leone is unacceptably draining Nigeria financially. For our economy to take off, this bleeding has to stop. The United Nations needs to do more in providing logistics and financial support to assist regional peacekeeping and peace-building efforts, as well as enhancing the welfare of refugees worldwide without discrimination.

My delegation believes that it has never been the purpose of the United Nations Organization to prescribe democracy and change for its members and yet make little or no progress in the democratization of its own organs, such as the Security Council. My delegation accordingly urges the General Assembly, during this session, to conclude deliberations and reach agreement on the modalities for the reform and expansion of the Security Council so that the Millennium Assembly will adopt them next year — and not later.

How can the United Nations continue to perpetuate and justify a situation where Africa is the only continent without a permanent seat in the Security Council? In order to promote reform and democratization of the Security Council, Africa, with 53 Member States, should be allocated at least two permanent seats — commensurate not only with the continent's size and population, but with its track record also of contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security.

I wish to reaffirm our belief that the United Nations is the most universal body ever designed for collectively resolving humankind's common problems. Our Organization has come a long way since its establishment 54 years ago. Although created in a different era and under different circumstances, and in spite of numerous constraints, the United Nations has continuously sought to adapt itself to the changes in the international political arena. It has been able to accomplish this to some degree, but it remains an institution whose working methods, procedures and administrative structure have in many respects become outdated.

Yet the world as we know it today without the United Nations would be inconceivable. For it has come to symbolize hope for a better and more secure future for many, particularly in the developing areas of the world. Indeed, though a majority of our countries could not be members when the Organization was created, we are today its strongest defenders and advocates of the ideals for which it stands. We believe in the family of nations, and within that family the strong members have the responsibility to protect and strengthen the weaker members.

At the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the third millennium, there is a need for stock-taking and for proper assessment of the

implementation of previous resolutions emanating especially from the major world summits and conferences which took place in this decade. Such an effort would bring us closer to the realization of the purposes and objectives of our Organization. In this regard, I stand before the Assembly and pledge Nigeria's continued contributions and positive commitment to the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco

His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco, His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, and invite him to address the General Assembly.

Crown Prince Albert (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you warmly, Mr. President, on your well-deserved election and to assure you of the delegation of Monaco's full cooperation in assisting you in the discharge of your lofty mandate. Your role in your country's exemplary struggle for independence and for the dignity of the Namibian people are deeply meaningful for us.

I should like also to thank the members of the General Assembly for entrusting to my country one of the vice-presidencies of this fifty-fourth session, at the same time as Monaco is commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the accession of His Most Serene Highness Prince Rainier III — my father. I wish to assure the Assembly that the delegation of Monaco will strive to be worthy of this honour and to work closely with the other members of the Bureau — whom I congratulate on their election — and the members of the Assembly, to ensure that this session, the last of the century, produces effective, concrete and tangible results.

I avail myself of this opportunity to thank also Mr. Didier Opertti, President of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, for his dedication and accessibility and for the competence and diplomatic skill with which he guided our work.

I should like also to congratulate and warmly welcome the three new States Members of the United Nations — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. The Government and people of Monaco are particularly pleased to greet these three countries of the Pacific, with which we share a number of concerns about the protection of the oceans and seas. We assure them of our readiness to enter into and develop a solid and fruitful cooperation with them.

Finally, I should like most sincerely to express my satisfaction, as many have already done from this rostrum, at the resumption of the peace process in the Middle East and the immense hopes to which it has given rise.

Since the general debate of the previous session, many distressing events have unfolded, some of which have had serious consequences that will last for years. The conflict in Kosovo, with the thousands of refugees and the massive suffering that it caused, was one of the most obvious. The whole of the United Nations system was mobilized, in a way that has certainly never happened before, to assemble the resources required to come to the aid of the populations in distress. The armed intervention and the decisive role played by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at The Hague, brought to bear in defence of the principles of humanity and human rights, seem to foreshadow a strengthened determination on the part of the international community to enforce respect for the fundamental values of justice and human dignity that inspired the San Francisco Charter.

We offer our sincere encouragement to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo as it strives, despite the major difficulties in its way, to implement the provisions of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). We wish courage, perseverance and success to the men and women responsible for carrying out that noble mandate of ensuring security, extinguishing the

flames of hate and restoring good-neighbourly relations among the communities.

I should also like to emphasize the crucial role played by the United Nations in holding the election on self-determination in East Timor and in the protection operation that our Organization has recently launched to come to the aid of the civilian population there. We are following developments on the ground extremely carefully, and we hope that implementation of Security Council resolution 1264 (1999) will proceed without hindrance or delay.

In this context, we should recall the very enlightening debate held by the Security Council on 12 February on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, during which the subject of internal conflicts, which have now become more numerous than those between States, was discussed at length. It was recalled that such conflicts fall under the purview of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, whose fiftieth anniversary we have just commemorated, especially the provisions of the Fourth Convention. Article 3, which is common to all four instruments, imposes rules of conduct that are binding on the High-Contracting Parties, whatever the circumstances and nature of the conflict. That article categorically prohibits any kind of attack on the life and physical and moral integrity of the person, as well as the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement or indispensable judicial guarantees.

On 16 and 17 September, a further debate took place in the Security Council on the same issue, the positive result of which was the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which makes considerable demands on both States and the international community as a whole. It stresses in particular that it is incumbent on States to put and end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law. The Principality of Monaco unreservedly endorses these recommendations, which we consider to be extremely important.

We have very high hopes for the establishment of the International Criminal Court as a means of better preventing war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Principality of Monaco was one of the first signatories of the Statute, which was adopted last year.

In Kosovo, in East Timor and in conflicts that are often forgotten or that receive no recognition, particularly those in Africa, it is the weakest and the most vulnerable, particularly children, who suffer most. With the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child taking place on 20 November, it is up to us now more than ever to see to it that children, in peace as well as in war, are strictly protected from all forms of violence and subjugation. Following on from the presidential statement of June 1998, Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), adopted on 25 August, will, we hope, make a decisive contribution to resolving the distressing problem of the fate of children in times of armed conflict.

My country, which is committed to that end, has been host to a number of international non-governmental organizations dedicated to the protection of children. These associations are working hand in hand with the United Nations specialized agencies. For its part, the Principality of Monaco is actively contributing on a regular basis to steps taken to improve the lot of the most disadvantaged children.

Just as children need to be protected, women, too, deserve the keenest attention from the international community. Many forms of discrimination and injustice — indeed, cruelty — including genital mutilation, which is the cause of much pain and humiliation, are still too often tolerated. They represent a number of obstacles to women's achieving their full potential. In a report recently submitted to the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization known for its competence and precision denounced the unacceptable treatment still being endured by women in many countries, be they young girls, wives or mothers. I should like in this connection to emphasize the high regard in which we held the high-level debate that took place in the Economic and Social Council last July on the role of jobs and work in the elimination of poverty, emphasizing in particular the advancement of women.

Women's access to jobs, as well as to education and professional training, has been widely encouraged. It is one of the areas of concern of the Government of the Principality, which is taking specific measures in the social and educational fields in order to deal with the issue. Respect for equality between men and women in daily life, as well as in the development of their professional careers, in both public and private sectors, is essential if we are to improve the situation of women and combat the precariousness and poverty that often affect them much more than men. We are particularly aware of that. The substantial involvement of women in political and economic decision-making can also

contribute to ensuring greater social justice, while stimulating and balancing the economy. The authorities of my country are convinced of this and are striving to take steps to adjust and complete the legislation of Monaco so as to ensure that in every respect it is in conformity with the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, so that Monaco can soon become a party to that essential instrument.

Because of the complexity and irrevocably globalized nature of today's economy, it has become necessary, now more than ever, to achieve greater balance at both the national and international levels. Existing inequalities, whatever their origin, must necessarily be reduced to make sure that the dangerous gap separating the industrialized countries from the most disadvantaged countries does not grow wider. The Ministers of Economics and Finance of 44 States and Governments members of the International Organization of La Francophonie were able to devote themselves to that subject during their first meeting, which took place in Monaco on 14 and 15 April last.

Those leaders, like those who met in Geneva at the July substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, recognized that globalization, if poorly controlled, could have serious consequences for the future of all nations. Stepped up trade and investment, and the adoption of policies of liberalization — sure engines of growth — have not yet enabled everyone to enjoy significant development. We must guard against some being barred from progress and from the benefits of the major trends in the world economy, something that could have serious consequences.

Aware of that danger and of the deterioration in international relations it could cause, ministers of the economy or of finance of Francophone countries, meeting in Monaco, recognized the need for better supervision of the human and social effects of ongoing economic processes, including structural adjustment policies. They stressed the importance of maintaining, or indeed increasing, official development assistance, while adopting appropriate measures to encourage private investment. They indicated their grave concern at the unbearable burden of external debt for many countries. The Government of Monaco shares that grave concern.

The Monaco Declaration issued at the end of their meeting by ministers of the economy or of finance of Francophone countries solemnly recalled the fundamental link among economic development, democracy and good governance. The Declaration stressed the importance of upcoming multilateral trade negotiations, noted the mission of the World Trade Organization to encompass all members of the international community, and stressed the importance of improving the international trading system so that it will make a greater contribution to sustainable development and to meeting the real expectations of peoples. It also invited the world financial community to maintain its assistance to development, through both official and private contributions.

The Principality of Monaco, which joined the Intergovernmental Agency of La Francophonie in organizing this first meeting, is committed to contribute actively to implementing the Monaco Declaration and to encourage the establishment of a permanent Francophone centre for gathering and exchanging economic information; the recent summit of heads of State or Government of Francophone countries, held at Moncton, Canada, from 3 to 5 September, agreed to establish such a centre in Monaco.

Supported by many world leaders, the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel debts that the poorest countries are finding it difficult to repay enjoys wide backing. Given certain modifications, it seems to us to be of great interest, if only because it will enable countries experiencing great difficulties to resume unhindered progress towards development. Here, my country's leaders are duly appreciative of the decision taken at Cologne last June by the heads of State or Government of the seven major industrialized countries and of Russia to reduce significantly the external debt of some 40 such countries.

I reaffirm Monaco's unswerving determination to meet its international obligations and its firm commitment to the values of human rights and humanitarian principles, and wish to affirm that the highest authorities of my country are devoting close attention to progress in the sphere of disarmament. The limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons is a constant concern of the Government of the Principality. In our view, universal ratification of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) — which, to our great satisfaction, was indefinitely extended in 1995 — should be promoted, as should the complete application of the comprehensive safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose remarkable International Laboratory of Marine Radioactivity we have been honoured to host since 1986.

The year-2000 conference of States parties to the NPT will be decisive. Here, my country praises those countries, some of them close friends, that have made major sacrifices to dismantle a portion of their nuclear arsenals while taking great care with the processing of the fissile materials extracted from them. We unreservedly share the view of Governments that favour the formulation and adoption of international rules to prohibit the production of fissile materials intended for the production of nuclear weapons and explosives.

The Government of the Principality considers that controls intended to prevent transfers of materials and equipment that could be used for the manufacture of nuclear weapons should be strengthened, but it strongly favours improved international cooperation for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy — given, of course, all the necessary precautions with respect to environmental protection.

The Principality of Monaco earnestly hopes for an early end to all nuclear-weapons tests; the threat that these weapons pose to mankind has often, and rightly, been denounced. We are convinced that the accession of all Powers to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) — which my father, the reigning Prince, ratified on 20 November 1998 — would be a giant step towards limiting these dreadful weapons of mass destruction. As a party to the CTBT, the Principality would wish to see greater commitment to that important treaty. We welcome the existence of nuclear-weapon-free zones established on the basis of arrangements freely entered into by the States of various regions, and hope that strengthening confidence and international security will ultimately lead to the spread of such zones.

Let me recall the keen interest of the Principality of Monaco in the implementation of the 1993 Paris Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, to which my country has been a party since 1 June 1995, and of the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, our instrument of accession to which was deposited on 30 April 1999.

My country welcomes the measures adopted at Maputo, Mozambique, last May, at the first Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which entered into force in Monaco on 15 March 1999.

Engaged from the very beginning in the fight against these deadly devices, which strike hardest at civilian populations, particularly the elderly, women and children, Monaco signed and quickly ratified this instrument. My country is fully determined to continue its efforts to contribute to eliminating these weapons once and for all.

When, on 12 November 1998, the Principality of Monaco signed the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing, it wanted to make a formal commitment and to place clearly on record its position in this regard. Through me, Monaco confirms that decision before the Assembly, once again condemning all forms of terrorism, which blindly and mercilessly strikes too many innocents, as we have had occasion once again to note recently.

In this spirit, it is appropriate to pay a special tribute to the United Nations Mission in East Timor for the role it is playing and for the courage its representatives are displaying, notably the members of the international staff that remained in place under the gravest of threats.

In this connection, I should like once again to forcefully reaffirm our complete solidarity with United Nations personnel, some of whom this year have lost their lives, been injured, or suffered violence and other grave offenses. Monaco, which was among the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, deplores in the strongest terms and condemns without reserve the inadmissible acts of aggression and intimidation of which they have been victims. We take this opportunity to salute the first among United Nations personnel, the Secretary-General, who enjoys our highest esteem for his actions at the head of the Organization, particularly during periods of crisis and in the extremely difficult circumstances with which he is regularly confronted.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco for the statement he has just made.

His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, Crown Prince of the Principality of Monaco, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: Before calling on the next speaker, I would like to request representatives to be good enough to move quietly through the aisles at the end of each statement and as they exit and enter the General Assembly Hall, in order not to disturb the speaker who has the floor. I rely on those present to cooperate in maintaining order and quiet in the Hall, in keeping with the dignity and decorum of Members of the General Assembly.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, His Excellency The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy.

Mr. Axworthy (Canada): Allow me first to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly. Canadians are proud to have accompanied you and your people on their journey to join the community of nations.

On behalf of Canada, allow me also to welcome the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as new Members of the United Nations.

(*spoke in French*)

Mr. President, your election is a tribute to your wisdom and your dedication to the goals of the United Nations. I am convinced that you will guide us well in carrying out the work that we are gathered here to do on behalf of all of the world's people.

(*spoke in English*)

Indeed, it is we the people for whom the United Nations was founded and its purposes forged. We the people, not we the nation States, or the ministers, or the ambassadors, or the Secretariat. Let us recall these lines from the United Nations Charter:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, ... to establish conditions under which justice ... can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, ... have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims".

These are noble words and compelling goals. But do they still ring true, or is there a need for new meaning and new commitment?

How would we the people assess the handiwork of the United Nations to date and judge the world scene today when we have seen in the last year alone the brutal ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, the slaughter and maiming of innocents in Sierra Leone, Angola, both Congos and Sudan and the cruel suppression of the independence agreement in East Timor? Or when we see kidnapping and terrorism plaguing virtually every region, the growing, powerful influence of the drug-traffickers and criminals, the return of the slave merchants and the emergence of modern warlords who brutalize and exploit communities for economic gain? Or when we are all subject to the darker side of globalization, where international commerce brings new but poorly distributed wealth, where helpless children are recruited into armies or sold on the internet for exploitive purposes, where environmental degradation inflicts a high cost on the smallest countries, which can least afford it?

Our world on the eve of the millennium is increasingly shaped by these and a variety of other direct threats to people. If we the peoples were to have the chance to rethink the Preamble to the Charter, we might well say that we are determined to save existing generations from the grave new risks to their personal and family security.

It is true that there is another perspective, one that gives a glimmer of hope. We could point with some satisfaction to the fact that, through the combined efforts of people working together across borders, there is an emerging sense of accomplishment in responding to these new threats to human security.

As of today, 86 nations have ratified the Convention on antipersonnel mines, ushering in a legal regime and a plan of action that will save the lives of thousands.

Working together last year, 120 nations voted in favour of an International Criminal Court, which will establish individual accountability for crimes against humanity.

In the field of conflict, the United Nations is now attempting to rebuild the broken fields of Kosovo after an unprecedented intervention for humanitarian reasons. And in East Timor, peacekeepers are bringing order to that long-troubled land.

So we the peoples have not given up in the face of the confusion, turmoil and misery which beset our world;

and we still search through the corridors of this building for words of cooperation and acts of consensus.

(spoke in French)

But it is not easy, because many forget that it is we the peoples, all the world's people, whom we are here to serve, not just their particular national interests. Too many protect their prerogatives, engage in exclusive power politics or refuse to pay their bills, thereby paralysing the institution and rendering it incapable of meeting the challenges to our collective well-being.

It is difficult to promote an agenda for the security of people when some stand opposed, on the basis of a desire to protect at all costs the sovereignty of the State. Of course, State sovereignty remains a fundamental tenet of peace and security; but it is not absolute, and it is not a shield behind which the most egregious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms can be hidden.

It is time, therefore, for we the peoples represented in this Assembly to reassess our influence and make our voices heard.

(spoke in English)

There is a new road map to lead the way. Last week the Secretary-General tabled a report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957) in which he captures many of today's challenges and sets out 40 recommendations for action.

The heaviest burden falls on the Security Council. The search for global peace increasingly turns on issues of personal safety. Modern conflict takes a huge, disproportionate toll on civilians. In this world, the protection of civilians must be central to the Council's work. It must provide the subtext for our future collective action and the impetus behind our efforts to prevent conflict, keep the peace, enforce sanctions and support the collective will of the United Nations.

The way ahead is not without obstacles. There are legitimate questions about the purposes, limits and standards for Council engagement for humanitarian ends, which itself also present difficult contradictions with regard to the principle of non-interference. Clear and consistent criteria are needed against which the necessity or otherwise of humanitarian intervention — including enforcement — can be judged and applied. These tests must be very demanding: the basis must be the existence of fundamental breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The human dimension makes it imperative that the Council adapt the blunt instrument of sanctions into a targeted tool so that they hurt where they are supposed to hurt. The Council needs also to show the resolve to implement sanctions once they are in place. This is Canada's objective as chairman of the Council's Angola sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 864 (1993) — to develop tougher measures to constrain the trade in arms and diamonds, thereby making it more difficult for UNITA to wage war. It is time to tackle the new war economy in which a direct relationship exists between certain businesses, mercenaries and warlords, a relationship that perpetuates misery, conflict and the victimization of innocent people.

A human security agenda highlights the urgent need to face clearly the issue of the Council's representation and its decision-making processes, especially the inappropriate use and persistent threat of the veto where it can compromise, complicate and slow down determined, urgent international action to protect people. The Council needs to come to grips with these challenges if it is to maintain its credibility in the eyes of the people it serves. Membership in the Council is a trust, and Council members need to demonstrate their capacity to maintain that trust.

The issues raised by the Secretary-General in his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict are issues that plague all peoples. The Secretary-General's proposals in fact go beyond the purview of just the Security Council; the onus for taking action lies with all Member States. For that reason, I strongly urge that the General Assembly should begin consideration of this report and move quickly to establish mechanisms to give effect to its recommendations, including a system of reporting to review implementation. Towards this end, Canada looks forward to working with the Secretary-General and fellow Member States to establish a "friends of civilians in armed conflict" group to help guide these efforts.

To protect civilians in armed conflict, the Assembly has the means to enable the United Nations to act more quickly; the moral authority to establish universal standards that hold us all accountable; and the legitimacy to direct efforts into new areas of global endeavour. The ability to respond rapidly when the security of civilians is threatened is essential. Giving the United Nations a

rapid response capability — particularly through the creation of a United Nations headquarters for rapid deployment — would be an important step. How much more effective could the United Nations have been in East Timor or in Kosovo if such a capability had existed?

The civilian side of peace operations — the police and the judges, the civil servants and the human rights experts — is also of growing importance, but insufficient capacity for rapid deployment is a problem here too. Clearly the "White Helmets" are as critical to building peace as the Blue Helmets, and they deserve no less of our attention. Those of us who are able might start by improving our respective national capacity to make contributions to be put at the service of the United Nations. This is something my Government has begun and is working to improve. Globally binding humanitarian and human rights standards for behaviour and practical mechanisms to hold transgressors accountable would also advance the security of people subjected to the horrors of armed conflict.

The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court was a qualitative step forward. It will help to end the culture of impunity and protect all people against the most egregious violations of humanitarian law. The Assembly's priority now should be to bring the Court to life. This means continued cooperation from us all in building the technical underpinnings of this Court. It also means ensuring prompt and widespread ratification of the Court's Statute.

Strengthened standards and strategies are needed elsewhere. For example, negotiating the strongest possible optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which should be accompanied by a comprehensive action plan, will help to confront one of the most heinous aspects of modern warfare and other conflict.

We agree with the Secretary-General that more must be done to protect humanitarian workers who risk their lives to help the victims of war. That is why Canada will be seeking an additional protocol to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel to provide legal protection to all personnel working in situations of armed conflict, including a broader range of non-governmental organizations and locally employed personnel.

Finally, the Assembly can direct its efforts towards making the safety of people the emphasis in a wider range of global endeavours.

(*spoke in French*)

The greatest threat to human safety remains the possibility of annihilation by nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction. Yet the non-proliferation regime that we have painstakingly built over the past 50 years remains fragile. We should now ensure that the obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons are respected, and we should implement the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and reduce the risk that nuclear weapons pose to our collective security.

Human security is also the impetus behind efforts to address the problem of small arms, which kill in conflict zones as well as on neighbourhood streets. This is a global challenge that requires a global solution. We should therefore convene a conference on the illicit traffic in small arms, with a comprehensive agenda.

(*spoke in English*)

Transnational crime, including the illicit drug trade, terrorism and human smuggling, is a closely related challenge. It has a direct impact on the safety of all our people. The conclusion of an effective United Nations transnational organized crime convention and its protocols would be a start to providing that protection.

Taken together, those efforts would be a strong beginning to orienting the Assembly to meet the real security needs of people today. I must be very blunt: improvement in human security is a necessary condition for success in the other important actions that we take to advance human, economic, aid and trade development. Farmers cannot work fields strewn with mines. Children cannot learn when they are abused and brutalized by war. Investors will not send money to regions racked by conflict. Societies cannot flourish when resources are pillaged to fuel violence and people are victimized by terror.

Ultimately, freedom from fear is intimately connected to the freedom from want. And it is freedom from fear for all peoples — which is at the heart of the Secretary-General's report and his recommendations — that provides the United Nations with a clear, defining role at the century's close. Our collective efforts towards that end will give concrete expression to the hopes and dreams of the generation that first made "we the peoples" the basis for this Organization. Next year's Millennium Assembly and summit offer an opportunity to articulate

a vision of the United Nations that places the safety of people at the centre of its agenda.

The United Nations cannot do it all. The challenges to advancing human safety are complex. Regional organizations play an important role. Practical cooperation between countries can address specific problems and the participation of members of civil society and non-governmental organizations is also imperative. But security for all of us begins and ends with a strong, effective United Nations focused on this goal. We the peoples should resolve to work together to achieve this end.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa.

Mr. Moussa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, it gives me great pleasure to extend to you, Sir, and to your friendly country my sincere congratulations upon your election as President of the General Assembly. I am fully confident that you will steer the work of this important session ably and effectively. I would also like to express my appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, for his wise conduct of the business of that session.

It also gives me pleasure on this occasion to salute the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his efforts to maintain the role of the international Organization, improve its performance, increase its efficiency and restore its credibility and effectiveness. My pleasure is all the greater in welcoming the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to membership of the United Nations.

The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is being held at a historic juncture that comes only once every 100 — indeed, every 1,000 — years. This is the last session of the General Assembly before the end of the twentieth century and of the second millennium since the birth of Christ. That century and that millennium have embodied a combination of mankind's greatest achievements as well as catastrophic tragedies.

Yes, the second millennium has witnessed momentous events. During the last century of this millennium, these events have taken place at a pace faster than any recorded history of humanity. The outgoing century has become a catalogue of contradictions, some of which bear testimony to mankind's genius and others to its ignominies and immoralities. All our diverse civilizations, without exception, have produced warmongers and destructive tyrants. They have also produced great leaders, advocates of peace, inventors, creative artists, scientists, explorers and statesmen who provided good leadership and gave wise counsel.

According to the Gregorian calendar, we are at the close of a century and a millennium. By the Hijri calendar, we are in the fifteenth century after the migration of the Prophet Muhammad, who revealed to the world a noble religion and gave it an enlightened civilization. We in Egypt are approaching the end of the seventh millennium in the life of an ancient country; a country that is as old as history itself; a country that contributed to the making and recording of history. Humanity's attainments at this time and in this age are not the fruit of the achievements of the twentieth century alone; rather, they are the result of the accumulated achievements made since the beginning of time. The Egyptians excelled at science and engineering and were the first to profess monotheism. The Babylonians gave the world the alphabet. The Phoenicians mastered navigation. The Arab civilization flourished in al-Andalus, preserved Greek philosophy and added to it. The Islamic civilization in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey made great contributions to all aspects of life. The Renaissance in the Italian city-States followed. Then came the French Revolution, advocating the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The industrial revolution started in Britain. America ushered in the computer, information and communication revolutions and the age of space exploration and atomic energy. I would also refer here to the profound philosophies and great civilizations that flourished in China, India, Japan and elsewhere.

This is a necessary statement of fact as we bid farewell to this century and this millennium. Everyone must be aware that we are all partners in the creation of the contemporary genius. Yet the future is our real concern. The future brings with it new challenges in the fields of science and information; economic and monetary matters; culture, politics and security; and the conduct of relations between peoples and societies. These are some of the challenges of the coming century. To this list must be added the legacy of the unresolved problems of the twentieth century.

The end of a century or a millennium does not mean the end or solution of existing problems. Indeed, it is a historical juncture and will undoubtedly mark new challenges. Problems, like progress, are characterized by

continuity. This makes it necessary to agree on a new forward-looking agenda that anticipates the future, its expectations and risks — an agenda that will prepare us to solve existing and persistent problems.

Here, I hasten to add that new breaths of fresh air have begun to blow in various parts of the world. They, too, will accompany us into the coming century. Africa continues to suffer from armed and ethnic conflicts and the disruption of development efforts. Yet a serious African policy is being developed to put an end to these conflicts and to achieve settlements on the basis of dialogue, national reconciliation and conciliation between neighbours. We also note that the African Summit held last June in Algiers decided that the countries whose Governments had taken power by unconstitutional means must restore constitutional legitimacy before the convening of the next African Summit in the year 2000. The Fourth Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of African Unity, held in Syrte earlier this month, reaffirmed the continent's resolve to proceed on the path of unity through the speedy implementation of a treaty establishing the African Economic Community.

On the Asian continent, the situation in the Korean peninsula and the question of Kashmir are still sources of tension and confrontation. Afghanistan remains a source of instability and tension and a haven for terrorism. Yet the Asian economies are showing signs of recovery and are preparing to compensate for the sacrifices that were made and the development efforts that were lost as a result of the financial crisis of 1997.

As for East Timor, the popular consultation held last August reflected, in the words of the Secretary General, the will of the people of East Timor for self-determination without representing victory or defeat for any of the parties. This process could not have been successful without the bold initiative of President Habibie. While calling for a peaceful and orderly transition of power, Egypt pays tribute to the wise decision of the Indonesian Government to accept the deployment of an international force in the territory. This is a responsible and wise course of action that will restore calm and order there.

Europe was the origin and theatre of the two World Wars that were bitterly experienced by humanity in its long history. There, the hateful practices of ethnic cleansing are again looming on the horizon. Yet, we have seen the international community take a clear and firm stand against such practices and against attacks on the identity of peoples and nations. We have also witnessed some progress in the constitutional dialogue that aims at resolving the question of Northern Ireland, the oldest contemporary crisis on the European continent.

In the Middle East, the peace process is now heading towards a new and positive stage. It is our hope that this will lead to a comprehensive, just, and peaceful settlement that will establish the Palestinian State, put an end to the occupation of the Syrian and Lebanese territories and ensure security for all. Thus, an end will be put to this conflict and its files will hopefully be closed.

Despite its centrality, the Arab-Israeli conflict is not the only problem in that vast region. Other problems include that of Western Sahara in northern Africa, the islands of the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf and the question of Sudan. The latter is high on the list of priorities of Egyptian diplomacy. For two years now, we have been making intensive efforts and establishing contacts with both the Sudanese Government and the opposition in order to achieve comprehensive national reconciliation and to preserve the unity, identity and territorial integrity of that brotherly country. We have been coordinating with Libya, the members of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the forum of the partners of IGAD to ensure that all the efforts undertaken in this regard are made in a concerted manner.

The situation of Iraq raises numerous questions. The matter does not have a bearing on the Government of Iraq alone. Rather, it pertains to the Iraqi people, their plight and the suffering of their children. An objective and positive review of the status of this important brotherly country has become necessary. This review should proceed from the premise that there are no eternal sanctions and that people have the right to resume normal life and to surpass the errors of the past and move to the bright horizons of the future. In so doing, they must fully abide by the accepted rules of international legality like all other people.

Indeed, Iraqi policy was erroneous in its invasion of Kuwait. A mistake, however, cannot be corrected by a policy which will lead to the collapse of an entire society or cause a whole country to implode. Therefore, Egypt is closely following the current efforts aimed at the suspension by the Security Council of the sanctions within the context of an understanding with the Iraqi Government and under the Council's supervision. This should be the first step towards the lifting of the sanctions

in accordance with paragraph 22 of resolution 687 (1991), all of whose paragraphs ought to be implemented in full.

I stated earlier that despite the high hopes and great expectations pinned on the new century, this historical juncture does not in and of itself bring the existing problems to an end. I am duty-bound to put before you Egypt's belief that certain major questions must be given top priority on the world agenda. These are: international peace and security, the question of the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, eradication of poverty, integration of the developing countries into the world economy on an equitable basis, dialogue between and complementarity of civilizations, and the question of terrorism. These questions transcend time and space in our contemporary world. Their agreed solutions must be the result of our collective thinking and collective action.

If democracy has become a necessary pillar in the formation of the political framework of the societies of the future, it must equally constitute the framework of international relations. Thus, it is necessary that the future world order be based on consensus, on the convergence of interests, on the acceptance of the right of others to make initiatives, and on appreciation for the premises from which they proceed. All this must be debated in a democratic spirit here in the General Assembly, within its new and evolving role.

What is indeed necessary is for us to arrive at a consensus on the regulation of international life. This desired consensus must respect the values, norms and principles that are deeply rooted in humanity's conscience. This consensus must achieve the necessary harmony between individual freedoms, on the one hand, and the collective rights to security, stability and development, on the other hand. It must foster a creative dialogue and a positive interaction between policies, cultures and civilizations, as it must refute the theory of "The Clash of Civilizations" and minimize the possibility of the clash of interests.

We believe that the world, particularly at this promising stage, can ill afford a new conflict or a new cold war. Those who propagate the theory that Islam could become the main threat to the West following the collapse of Communism ignore the fact that Islam is a philosophy and a way of life. It is not an artificial concoction that carries within it the seeds of its demise, as Communism did. They wilfully disregard history's greatest lesson: interaction among diverse cultures enriches all cultures, elevates all civilizations and adds to their vitality and prosperity.

It is only logical for most societies in our world today not to accept the imposition of a single view on world problems. It is also logical for them to reject the view that the interests of a sole society should be given precedence over all others or that the considerations, capabilities and interests of a certain civilization should be forced on all other world civilizations. Therefore, Egypt supports the resolution adopted by the General Assembly last year, at Iran's initiative, proclaiming the year 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Egypt also welcomes the Secretary-General's appointment of a special representative for this important subject.

Addressing the question of dialogue among civilizations is not separate from addressing the question of terrorism. Some thinkers have attempted to brand a certain civilization and culture with that affront.

The phenomenon of international terrorism is not linked to any particular civilization, culture or religion. It recognizes no boundaries and threatens all societies equally. It has become a grave danger that we must urgently combat and eradicate. We have seen acts of terrorism in all parts of the world with diverse cultures and civilizations, but the challenge is one and the same.

The United Nations and many States have gone quite far in facing this phenomenon. However, the few scattered and isolated international conventions and resolutions that deal with it need an integrated framework to turn them into a binding legal code. This code should reflect the concerted efforts of the international community to combat and contain terrorism and to deprive it of any haven or financing.

In this regard, Egypt renews the call of President Hosni Mubarak to convene an international summit under United Nations auspices. The summit, whose objective framework and timing must be agreed upon by consensus, would be mandated to codify the collective and organized will of the international community in dealing with terrorism and in providing the necessary action to combat and deter it.

I would like to move to other, equally important, issues, among which are disarmament and the maintenance of international peace and security. In doing so, I must recall the need to observe the priorities

established by the international community in 1978. Foremost among these priorities are nuclear disarmament and the elimination of other weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, there is a clear need to accelerate the process of nuclear disarmament at the unilateral and bilateral levels as well as within the Conference on Disarmament. There is also a need to speedily achieve the universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

These considerations impelled the States of the Alliance of the New Agenda: South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Ireland, Sweden, New Zealand and my country, Egypt, to adopt a joint declaration in June 1998. The Alliance tabled a resolution, which was adopted by the General Assembly last year by a large majority, calling for the adoption of serious and concrete steps in this regard. The members of the Alliance will continue their efforts during this session.

On the regional level, I have repeatedly stated that the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, which is the optimum way to ensure the security of the Middle East region as a whole, can be achieved only within a comprehensive framework applicable to all without exception. Peace cannot endure with an imbalance of power or a discrepancy in rights and obligations in matters pertaining to national security.

In this regard, all the States of the Middle East, with the sole exception of Israel, have acceded to the NPT and the international regime for the inspection of nuclear facilities. This constitutes a source of constant tension. It negates to a large extent the effectiveness of the international instruments on non-proliferation and arms control. It will lead to an arms race. It is illogical to give a special privilege or a certain exception to only one State in as vast and sensitive a region as the Middle East, and under unacceptable pretexts.

Sound logic necessitates an end to this exception and calls firmly for Israel's accession to the NPT. This subject will force itself on the 2000 NPT Review Conference. The States parties to the Treaty agreed in 1995 on an integrated and comprehensive package to enhance the non-proliferation regime and achieve its universality. The extension of the Treaty was but one of the elements of that package. I would like to stress here the importance of giving top priority at the next Review Conference to crystallizing the serious steps for achieving the universality of the Treaty. The States parties to the Treaty must honour all the obligations and commitments made in 1995 without selectivity or discrimination. Egypt and many other States insist on that. Otherwise, we will reach a state, which has actually begun, of suspicion and lack of confidence.

This will have a grave effect on the credibility of the NPT regime. It will weaken that regime considerably, making it possible to deviate from its provisions or make them subject to exceptions.

Talking of regional security in the Middle East leads me to address the peace process. Egypt maintains, as it always has, that a comprehensive peace based on justice is the only durable and stable peace. This means Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, the establishment of a State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital, restoring the legitimate human and national rights of the Palestinian people and the achievement of security for all. The peace process must deal with all the problems in good faith and with courage. It must not postpone dealing with or negotiating any item or problem. The postponement or abandonment of problems is a postponement and abandonment of peace. This is dangerous and unacceptable and runs counter to the framework and spirit of peace. It might even postpone the establishment of normal relations between the Arab States and Israel.

We had hoped that the Arab-Israeli conflict would come to an end before the end of the twentieth century. This hope is still alive, since the year 2000 is the last year of this century.

This year we witnessed a human tragedy, the likes of which we thought was impossible given the progress that mankind has achieved before the advent of the twenty-first century. Here I refer to the tragedy of Kosovo. While welcoming the adoption by the Security Council of a resolution on the establishment of a Transitional Administration in Kosovo, we stress the need for learning from this tragedy so that succeeding generations will never witness its likes again.

Allow me to address one aspect of this problem which pertains to our present discussion -- the degree to which the rules of international legality, as represented by the United Nations, were observed in a situation that pertains to the maintenance of international peace and security. Here we find that the question of Kosovo was a unique case of international consensus and disagreement at one and the same time. There was a consensus on the need for immediate action to stop the grave crime of ethnic cleansing. At the same time there

was disagreement on who had the right to act. There were different approaches, among which is the one we believe in — namely, that any international action must stem from the Security Council as the competent organ primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. If the Council were unable to do so, then the General Assembly would be the organ that must deal with any threats to international peace and security, as it represents the common interest of all its members.

Our insistence, and that of many others on the essential role of the United Nations, has been reflected in the following significant message; that regardless of how the international order is described, as old or new, international participation in it must take place through the United Nations, particularly when the matter concerns the maintenance of international peace and security.

In this context, I would like to refer to the Secretary-General's report on the work of the Organization and to his statement made last Monday, in which he reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the collective security system in a manner that would enable the international community to deal with crises before they spin out of control, and the primary role of the Security Council in this regard. The Secretary-General has put forward a number of innovative concepts to develop a "culture of prevention" of crises, among which is the concept of preventive diplomacy. Thus far, no agreement has been reached on the scope of the application of this concept since it was first dealt with in 1992 in "An Agenda for Peace". They also include the concept of the preventive deployment of forces, which will raise numerous questions in view of its connection to the sovereignty of States. Also included is the call for humanitarian intervention and its scope, a suggested role for transnational corporations and the concept of the assessment of the security impact of development policies, which could open the door for new conditionalities if these ideas are not developed democratically, objectively and non-selectively. These ideas and suggestions deal with concepts that are not yet established. This makes it necessary to debate them in an international format characterized by the highest degree of openness and transparency. Their formulation and terms should be agreed upon by all. We propose officially – and we call upon the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General to take the necessary actions in this regard – to have the General Assembly, or a committee of the whole within it, debate these ideas and give them substance. They must be adopted by a consensus of all States, and the Secretary-General would be asked to present a report on the results of this debate to the General Assembly at its next session, in the light of which the Assembly would take a decision on his suggestions.

The World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen made the eradication of poverty a top priority for international action, because it pertains to the stability of the international order and its credibility. Yet the increasing marginalization of the developing countries, particularly that of the least developed countries, most of which are in Africa, threatens to create new lines of confrontation between the North and the South. This confrontation would be fuelled by unjust economic, social and development considerations and standards, and it could negatively affect international stability.

Egypt, the current Chair of the Group of 15, presented a paper to the eighty-seventh session of the International Labour Organization reflecting the views of the Group regarding the negative effects of globalization, the crisis of international markets and the concomitant increase in unemployment. All these matters must be taken into account in the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action and the programmes of action of other major conferences.

We also note that some developed countries have adopted protectionist measures under the pretext of protection of the environment, respect for human rights and labour standards. These policies deepen the imbalances in the international trading system. Here I must reaffirm the need for the developed countries to honour all their obligations under the Uruguay Round and the full implementation of the agreements and resolutions of that Round before engaging in any new negotiations to further liberalize international trade.

I further reaffirm the importance of strengthening the role of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) at its tenth session, to be held in Bangkok, to achieve a balance between the interests of the developed and the developing countries. Here I must refer to the role of the international financial institutions. This question needs a conscientious review in the light of the current changes in the international economic arena. The review should make these institutions more responsive to the needs of comprehensive development. It should ensure the full participation of the developing countries in the making of decisions on the reform of the international financial system.

In conclusion, we look forward to the new century with hope; yet the questions surrounding it abound, foremost of which is that two thirds of the people of the world live in a state of underdevelopment and suffering. How could we face the challenges of the wars that continue to rage, the continued flows of refugees, war crimes that continue to be perpetrated and the dire poverty of those who cannot have their daily bread or afford a school to educate their children or a hospital to treat them? Any talk about globalization must take all that into account.

These were the challenges of the past. They are also the challenges of the present, and will be the challenges of the future. We will be able to face them only with a stronger will and a stronger commitment, with a more objective way of thinking and more effective mechanisms for action. In this way we will arrive at a new social contract, usher in a new economic era and forge a new security consensus for the world of tomorrow.

The President: The next speaker is the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat.

Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Arafat (Palestine)(*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to see you presiding over this new session of the General Assembly after your long struggle to gain freedom, along with Sam Nujoma, Nelson Mandela and others who fought to bring an end to the era of colonialism, apartheid and foreign occupation.

Your presence here today leading this session of the General Assembly attests to the victory achieved by the people of Namibia in the battle for freedom and independence. It strengthens the hope of the Palestinian people that the dawn of their freedom and the independence of their homeland, Palestine, is near. Furthermore, the victory of your friendly country, Namibia, affirms the constructive role played by the United Nations in the eradication of the colonialism that has burdened oppressed peoples and in enabling them to gain their national independence. I call upon the United Nations to continue to undertake this historic role to eliminate all forms of occupation and colonialism and to strengthen the foundations of peace throughout the world.

As I congratulate and welcome you, Sir, I would be remiss if I did not extend our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti. It also gives me great pleasure to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, for his distinguished role in leading this international Organization and promoting for world peace.

I also want to congratulate the three new members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. Their membership is an important step towards the realization of the universality of the Organization.

I address the Assembly today — the representatives of the international community — for the second consecutive year, seeking the continuation of support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly at this crucial and sensitive stage that lies between us and the declaration of our independent Palestinian State and sovereignty over our liberated land. This requires the strengthening of international efforts in order to really achieve a just solution to the question of Palestine, the crux of the Middle East conflict. The coming millennium summit, with all the renewed hope and promising beginning it represents for all people, must be a decisive deadline for the achievement of peace in the Middle East. We should work collectively and vigorously to achieve this. I look forward to the participation of Palestine, as a Member State of the United Nations, in the deliberations of the coming millennium summit, and I hope for and trust in the Assembly's support for this Palestinian determination to achieve independence so that Palestine can assume the position it deserves within the family of nations.

As the Assembly is aware, we concluded the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum with Mr. Barak, the new Prime Minister of Israel, on 4 September, under the auspices of President Hosni Mubarak, and in the presence of King Abdullah II, Secretary of State Albright, Mr. Moratinos, representing the European Union, and Mr. Larsen, representing Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Memorandum is aimed at the implementation of all the obligations of the interim period under the Oslo agreement, the Wye River Memorandum and the Hebron Protocol, and at the resumption of the final status negotiations. This was done with the hope of bringing to an end the policy of protraction and freezing that was pursued by the former Israeli Government, which completely paralysed the peace process and almost dashed

the ambitious hopes created by this process for all the countries and peoples of the Middle East.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum serves as a source of new hope for putting the peace process back on the right track, as it reaffirms the implementation of existing agreements and of all the obligations within a specific time-frame. In this connection, I extend my gratitude and thanks to all those who contributed to the conclusion of the Memorandum, particularly our host in Sharm el-Sheikh, President Hosni Mubarak, as well as King Abdullah II and Secretary of State Albright, who undertook tangible and concrete efforts as a representative of President Clinton, and the European leaders, their representatives and their envoys to the peace process. The continuous involvement of these friends in this process was essential and necessary for pushing the process forward. International sponsorship of the Middle East peace process is the guarantee for its definitive and final success.

The absence of such an international role would send the fragile situation in the region back to square one. I therefore call upon the international community to accelerate and strengthen its efforts and participation to push the peace process forward and revitalize it on all tracks. A just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can last only if it is protected by international legitimacy and if efforts are undertaken to implement all of the resolutions pertaining to the Middle East conflict on the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

We should work hard so that the signing of this Memorandum will succeed in ending the stagnation of the peace process and in opening the door that the former Israeli Government closed in the face of all serious efforts aimed at achieving real peace.

As we reaffirm once more our commitment to the peace process and the implementation of the signed agreements, we hope that this time the Israeli side will implement these agreements scrupulously and honestly, including the phases of redeployment agreed upon in the Wye River and Oslo agreements, the release of prisoners and the other obligations of the transitional period, such as safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the construction of the Gaza seaport.

The Israeli Government is called upon to immediately and decisively cease all measures that violate international resolutions, laws and covenants and thus destroy the chances of peace. At the forefront of these are the settlement activities and the confiscation of land, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and its vicinity, and the siege of the city of Bethlehem and the rest of the Palestinian territories. The continuation of these settlement policies and practices will quash the hopes and expectations generated by the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and destroy prospects for the final settlement negotiations, which began on 13 September. The cessation of all such measures is needed in order that we can, together with my new partner, Mr. Barak, continue the march of the peace of the brave that we began with two other partners — the late Yitzhak Rabin, who gave his life for this peace, and Shimon Peres — for a new Middle East.

Hence, we look forward to seeing new, real and tangible changes in the positions and actions of the Israeli side that will open the door, in word and in deed, for the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace — a peace of the brave that will lead to the realization of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital, and the realization of the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homeland in accordance with resolution 194 (III) which affirms the right of the refugees to return to their homes and the right to compensation for those who do not wish to return.

The realization of the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital will provide the definitive guarantee for the establishment of a permanent peace in the Middle East. It will also be a validation of the Charter of the United Nations and its numerous resolutions over 50 years, beginning with resolution 181 (II) which called for the establishment of two States in Palestine, one Jewish, which is Israel, and one Arab, which is Palestine. The rights of peoples do not diminish because of a statute of limitations or under oppression, and our people have proved through the years that they deserve life, freedom and their own independent State. The time has come for the international community, represented by the General Assembly, to reaffirm this right and to work for its realization.

The goal of the current peace process is the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the application of the principle of land for peace. The latter means total Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif — the Holy City of Jerusalem, which is the first

of the two *Qiblahs* and the third Holy Sanctuary of Islam, the place from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven, and the cradle of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The catastrophe that befell our people 51 years ago, uprooting them from their homeland and dispersing them into exile — thereby stripping them of their dreams and rights as human beings in an attempt to negate their existence — is one of the greatest human tragedies witnessed by the twentieth century. The question of the refugees of Palestine is the oldest and greatest refugee question in our contemporary world. We must recognize the legitimate right of those refugees to return to their homeland, in accordance with United Nations resolutions. Four million Palestinians live in exile and in refugee camps awaiting the time of their return to their homeland, from which they were forcibly expelled. There is no way to achieve peace, stability and security in the Middle East without a solution to the question of the refugees of Palestine and the implementation of resolution 194 (III), which declares their right to return to their homeland.

Two essential things must occur for peace to be complete. First, it is necessary to reach a final settlement on all tracks — the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese — on the basis of the complete and precise implementation of international legitimacy, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978). The second is the provision of economic support and assistance by the international community sufficient for the achievement of a better economic situation and for achieving prosperity in the region. What is required foremost in this regard is raising the Palestinian economy up from the miserable situation in which it finds itself as a result of the long years of occupation, so that building cooperative economic relations in the region will become possible.

Here I wish to thank the donor countries that have provided and continue to provide important assistance to the Palestinian people and to the Palestinian Authority. This assistance is necessary to enable us to overcome the immense difficulties that we have been confronting since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, as a result of the closures and sieges imposed by the previous Israeli Government on the Palestinian territory for long periods, which worsened further the total destruction of the Palestinian economy. The shadows of poverty and unemployment still threaten our economic abilities and plans to reconstruct, build and develop.

The achievement of all of this necessitates the continuation of the constructive efforts of the United Nations, which has permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until that issue is resolved in all its aspects. We will also remain in need of our Arab brothers, the Islamic countries and our friends in the Non-Aligned Movement. We will remain in need of the two co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States and the Russian Federation, and also of the European Union, China, Japan, Norway and our other friends around the world.

We must heighten all our efforts until the arrival of the new millennium in many areas and spheres, and not only in the Middle East. In this respect, we have observed some positive developments which are quite reassuring. There is tangible improvement in the area of conflict resolution on the African continent and on the path towards achieving better economic and social development in that great continent. There is the international attention given to Kosovo, as well as other measures carried out in the Balkans. There is also the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as the additional consideration being given to the four Geneva Conventions on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary. We refer here, with appreciation, to the convening of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention last July regarding the Israeli occupation of our land. There are also the follow-ups and reviews of a series of international conferences five years after their convening, in addition to the preparations being made with regard to such important issues as the culture of peace and the dialogue among civilizations.

All of these things are important developments, but perhaps not enough for us to be able to begin the new millennium under new circumstances. This is particularly so if we look at some of the events and worrisome developments in different areas. There is the continuation of the state of siege in Iraq and the profound suffering of its brotherly people. There is also the continuation of internal conflicts in many countries, such as Afghanistan and others. Recently there have also been worrisome developments in East Timor. But I would like, in particular, to refer to the rise of extreme poverty and to the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots on the individual, national and regional levels.

Perhaps it is we, the poor people of the South, who are most concerned about how to bridge the gap between us and the North, particularly in this era of globalization

of the world economy, whose challenges and consequences we must all face. Here we must exert serious efforts and seek creative means beyond hasty and temporary measures. While it is time for the South to be more prepared to realize such an achievement, the North should also be more prepared for partnership and more realistic, effective and just sharing.

In addition to economic matters, we must also strive to achieve some needed improvements at the political level, particularly with regard to international political relations. It is imperative in this connection that we all give greater significance to the United Nations. This must be done in order for this body to truly and urgently become the effective centre of international and political relations and the source of international legitimacy. It is also necessary to be wholly committed to upholding the principles and provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and of international and humanitarian laws, as well as ensuring that they apply to all. We should apply to others the same moral values as we accept for ourselves. There should be one set of criteria and one standard for all cases and in all places. All of this will lead to a more credible system of international relations, in which the incentive to commit wrongs will be lessened and the collective capability to confront and prevent those wrongs will, in turn, be enhanced.

It is with great pride that I would now like to speak of the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations. The Palestinian city of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, is the place where we are making preparations to celebrate the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third. It is also there, in Palestine, that the past, the present and the future will meet in a global vision of hope for all peoples. It is a religious and spiritual occasion of high importance, not only for our people and the other peoples of the region, but also for all the faithful around the world and for the entire international community. I appreciate the unanimous adoption last year of the resolution concerning this great and important matter, and invite the Assembly to continue to grant it its attention and consideration this year.

Here, I wish to extend once again the Palestinian people's invitation to the Assembly and to all the leaders of the world to visit us during this important spiritual and religious occasion in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and the other religious and spiritual places, so that we can proudly live together in peace at this special, historic time.

I should like to extend my gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to the Committee's Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, to the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and to all the staff members of this international Organization working in programmes relating to the question of Palestine. They have all provided immeasurable support to the just cause of the Palestinian people and have most certainly contributed to advancing the peace process towards the achievement of a just, permanent and comprehensive peace — a peace of the brave that will secure justice and freedom for the Palestinian people and their sovereignty over their land, along with security, stability and peace for all countries and peoples of this region.

Once again I express my congratulations to you, Mr. President, and my gratitude to all the members of the international community, reiterating to you the appeal of Palestine — an appeal of right, justice and peace.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.